

THINGS TO BE ALTERED.

To the traveller in England, particularly in summer, nothing can be more lovely than the scenery through which he journeys — the fields teeming with crops, the well-trimmed hedges, the orchards loaded with apples, the neat whitewashed cottages, the wooded park and the squire's mansion, the spire of the village arising from out the trees, the towers and domes of the distant town. Certainly we may well be excused for thinking that English country is the very perfection of country, and surpasses all others. Our English villages are the very type of simple quiet and health, while our villagers are considered the models of decent and honest character. So in many cases they are, and so in all cases they ought to be; but if we look a little beneath the surface, we shall find, alas! that the old proverb,

"God made the country, and man made the town," applies as well to our rustic haunts as to the busy hum of cities. I daresay I have not a single reader who does not know some favourite provincial town, little or big — the church tower peering above the trees, the quaint, irregular streets, the picturesque "bits" of gable and high-pitched roof, the bright clear river flowing under the bridge, and contributing largely to the bright and cleanly look of all around; we all know such a town, but perhaps we do not all know, or care to know, that the quiet churchyard beneath the trees is full to excess of the mortal remains of inhabitants dead and gone — that the old-fashioned well at which generations of townsmen have drunk, is supplied with water that filters through the same churchyard, to which fact, indeed, it owes that sparkling water for

which it is proverbial, — that scarce one of the picturesque old houses has any drain but a cesspool, — that the bright-looking river is polluted throughout by the refuse of the streets, aided probably by the scum and scourings of a tan-yard, which in dry weather sends up odours that penetrate far and wide, — that the parish doctor is worked off his legs with cases of typhus and diphtheria, — and that the bills of mortality in general would startle the inhabitants, if ever they took the trouble to inquire into them.

Well, say you, we will not go and live in a town, but will pitch our tent in that charming little village outside, with its one straggling street, the farmyard at the end of it, and its row of thatched cottages. And yet you will not be long in the village ere you find the doctor riding by far too often, and calling daily at these cottages which have excited your admiration.

Yes, indeed! our villages are too frequently whited sepulchres, lovely externally, but full of rottenness within. The farmyard is generally allowed to drain its belongings (which should be its most valuable perquisites) down the village street, stagnant and unheeded; the cottages are guiltless of any system of drainage, except the inevitable cesspool and the puddle that usually lies before the door; the pig, that blessed payer of the rent, is unwholesomely omnipresent underneath the window, sending up horrible savours into the rooms above; and, worse than all, the decencies that should pervade every English household, both great and small, are too often absent; and why? because landlords and house-owners shut their eyes to the fact that whole families; are compelled to herd together like swine, from want of room and

those few conveniences of life which make all the difference between the entourage of a Christian and a savage. Can we wonder, when we find the persons whose place it is to see to these things, so fearfully forgetful of their bounden duty, whether from carelessness, avarice, or hard, heartedness, that filth, ill-health, indecency, and loss of self-respect should be so common, or that we should find the young people thronging our streets, — the boys idle, dissolute vauriens, the girls wretched flaunting Traviatas? If my reader thinks the case exaggerated, let him look to the Times, and read the accounts which not so long ago appeared, of whole districts of labourers cottages in which drainage was unheard of, and where decency and cleanliness could only flourish under difficulties. Is it not the first duty of , every one who owns a house, to see with his own eyes that the requisite necessities are provided for its inmates? But I suppose that it is too much to expect of all landlords, some of whom certainly perform their part of the work nobly and unsparingly, while others wait until the force of public opinion shames them, or the approach of cholera frightens them, forgetful of the fact that the constant presence of fever and small-pox is more fatal in its ravages than the occasional appearance of the pestilence.

A step in the right direction has just been taken in the North, at a meeting where these facts and their results were openly avowed — viz., that, amongst other evils operating prejudicially on the working classes, that of defective house and sleeping accommodation was one of the chief agents in producing the immorality that was alleged to exist. I do not believe that Cumberland and Westmoreland are a whit more immoral than

other English or Scotch counties; but that, on the other hand, we should find the immorality complained of to be pretty universal over England. The only difference is, that public attention has not been aroused so far as to cause a remonstrance with those who have neglected their duties. Let the landlords, house-owners, and farmers look to these things in good time, and we shall soon find our reward in increased good-feeling, morality, and outward prosperity. For what can tend more to pauperism than a loss of self-respect? Where that is absent, there is less and less reluctance to appeal to the parish and become a hanger-on of the relieving officer. I believe that the poor law, as frequently administered, is greatly abused. What is the reason that we are continually hearing of such frightful cases of neglect and starvation as are reported in the newspapers? Some of the London unions, in the very heart of the metropolis, where one would think that, if anywhere, things would be managed decently, are perfect hotbeds of scandal as regards the unfortunate poor.

Scarcely a week passes without a complaint being made at the police courts of relief being refused to some miserable wayfarer, of abuse on the part of the Bumbles, puffed up with a little brief authority, or of neglect of the sick and dying, until some worse fiasco than usual occurs — a case terminates unfortunately, and, notwithstanding the most laudable efforts to hush it up, it leaks out, so as imperatively to demand an inquiry. A commissioner is sent accordingly, and there is an edifying scene of officials all trying to turn the blame on each other and to screen themselves, with a chorus of applauding guardians in the background equally determined to shield their servants from punishment. Then there is

a censure from the Poor Law Board, and a recommendation that certain things be altered, and so the case of the unfortunate victim is disposed of, and is heard no more until a fresh complaint comes before the public. True, as an economic measure, all this has a certain value, for the natural and thoroughly English dislike of our poor to seek relief in the "house," as long as they can keep body and soul together out of it, is thus considerably heightened; and I verily believe that numbers of people die of slow starvation, rather than venture to encounter the indignities and the miseries of the union. Surely there is something wrong in all this, for our poor law was intended to give relief to all deserving poor, and not to be a bye-word and a standing threat to honest poverty.

I cannot help thinking that one great cause of this state of things is owing to the gentlemen of England, whose place as well as pride it should be to consider themselves in reality as well as in name, the guardians of the poor.

Throughout the country every magistrate is a guardian ex officio , and every gentleman, whether magistrate or not, can be a guardian if he will. But is it not too often the case that the gentlemen have given up their duties to a much lower class of men, a large number of whom are petty tradesmen, with no education, no refinement, and no liberality among them; many of them, indeed, being interested from a money point of view in the economical working of the house?' What can be expected, therefore, but that under these circumstances the spirit of kindness should be at the lowest ebb, and the pauper too often looked upon as a skeleton frame, which should have the least possible

sustenance.

I should like to know how the magistrates of England would care to see their magisterial duties usurped by the same class as have usurped their duties of looking after the poor: and yet one would think that fining a "drunk and incapable" was not a more honourable occupation than seeing that their poorer brethren were properly relieved.

I know many unions where the gentlemen of the district only attend the Board meetings on occasions when there is an election or some particularly interesting question to be discussed; thus causing a sort of antagonistic feeling amongst the guardians who are regular attendants, and who therefore combine together to thwart as much as possible the influence of the "ex officios." I am quite sure that if the aristocracy of England would condescend to look into matters more closely, many of these horrible complaints and scandals would cease, and we should not hear of such tragedies as that of Timothy Casey.

The masters and relieving officers should be under a much stricter surveillance, and not allowed to use their tongues with the free license that many of them do. The medical men should be paid properly; for how can we expect to obtain medical skill and knowledge when we offer no inducement? It is a well-known fact, that medical men will only take parish appointments as a last resource, or as a commencement of practice, in the hope that by so doing they may found a claim for themselves in the neighbourhood. There are some poor-law districts which only offer the imposing

salary of £10 or £20 for the medical relief of their poor, and even in cases where the pay ranges as high as £100 per annum, it is only in places where the population is so large that it is tantamount to forbidding any private practice.

Surely, if it is our policy and our duty to take cognisance and care of our poor, they should be taken care of thoroughly and with no half measures; and we trust that, now public attention has been attracted to the subject, the days will have gone by when we hear of such things as the guardians of the poor in the most civilized and richest city in the world publicly rebuked by the Commissioners for inhumanity and severity, particularly when we know that the criminal in his prison is fattening on liberal diet which is considered far too good for the honest poor man. That poverty is a crime, is exemplified in this our city of London with stinging emphasis, and we of the nineteenth century ought to feel humiliated that it is so.

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